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A DARK PERIOD OF OUR CIVIL WAR AND A NOTABLE SPEECH OF THAT TIME

BY DUANE MOWRY

IT is not generally known that the late ex-Senator James R. Doolittle, for twelve years—from 1857 to 1869—a senator from Wisconsin, had it in mind to write something of the political history of this country covered by his own active and aggressive public life. He had seriously entered upon the preparation of considerable manuscript at the time of his death. The fact that he was a poor man, in so far as this world's goods are concerned, was undoubtedly, the principal reason that prevented him from carrying out his original purpose. He could not afford wholly to surrender the time necessary to prepare this history and neglect the duty of bread-winning which his straitened financial circumstances demanded. Nevertheless, such a book was near and dear to his heart. And it would have been a source of keen satisfaction if he could have submitted such a volume to the American people.

Among the manuscripts prepared by Judge Doolittle for such a history of his time, the following will have a peculiar interest for the student of the time included in the war of the rebellion. The original matter is in the writer's possession and has never been published.

"The darkest and gloomiest period of our civil war was when the thirty-seventh congress adjourned in March, 1863. It was after the Peninsular Campaign of 1862 under General McClellan had failed; that campaign resulted not in capturing Richmond, as was hoped and expected; but, after many battles and great sacrifices, it resulted in a retreat to Harrison's Landing for protection by our gunboats. 'It was from there, after this retreat, that McClellan, July 3rd, 1862, telegraphed to the secretary of war, the saddest news that ever came to Washington:

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‘To accomplish the great task of capturing Richmond and putting an end to this rebellion, re-inforcements should be sent to me rather much over than less than 100,000 men.’

“Pope’s Virginia Campaign and the defeat at the Second Bull Run soon followed; that was equally depressing. Not long after came the dreadful slaughter and repulse of the army of the Potomac, under Burnside at Fredericksburg in December, 1862. These misfortunes, we might rather say, these great disasters, were followed, in February, 1863, by a number of bold and successful raids by the rebel cavalry across the Rappahannock and Potomac, not very far from Washington; one, December 25th, by J. E. B. Stuart, across the Rappahannock, capturing 26 wagons and 200 prisoners, and burning some railroad bridges; another, by Imboden’s troopers, February 16th, 1863, surprising a supply train, capturing 76 men, 27 wagons and a hundred horses; a third, by Fitz Hugh Lee, February 25th, 1863, surprising a camp, capturing 150 prisoners; and a fourth, February 26th, 1863, by General W. E. Jones, more daring still, routing two regiments and capturing many prisoners.

“The news of this last raid was received at Washington just before the day of adjournment. It produced great excitement in Washington; in the senate chamber—almost a panic. A resolution requesting the president to appoint a day of prayer and humiliation was unanimously adopted, while senators in private conversation, gave way, almost to despair; some of them wringing their hands, saying: ‘All is lost,’ and at the same time complaining most bitterly of the president and of all the Generals who had been in command of the army of the Potomac.

“It was this gloomy state of things—this panic—which prompted—or rather inspired the following extemporaneous speech from Senator Doolittle of Wisconsin. It came as an outburst of the soul. It shows that a belief that the United States of America is God’s Republic, is no new belief with him; that belief sustained and cheered him there, in that hour which sorely tried the souls of men. We wish every thoughtful young man and young woman in the United States might read that speech.

GIR

It is found in volume 62 of the Congressional Globe, part II and appendix, pp. 1530-31.

“ ‘In Senate, March 3, 1863. Half past eleven o’clock. Mr. Doolittle said:

“ ‘Mr. President: The last hour of the session is passing away. There can be no more practical legislation. I would not spend this last hour in crimination and re-crimination. Rather let us for a single moment look back on the session about to close,—the most laborious, the most momentous in our whole history.

“ ‘Sir, the Congress which is now expiring, will live forever in that history. It has passed more laws, it has passed more important measures than any other since the Government began,—important from every point of view, for their magnitude, and for the great principles which are involved in those measures. Look at the financial measures brought forward and passed; involving more than a thousand million dollars; at the great currency measure which has passed at this session of Congress; which is to give us a national currency, based not upon monopoly, but upon free banking; at the great military measures, necessary to command our whole force on land and on sea, to put down this rebellion; at the organization of our national armies; at the organization of our national navy; those great and gigantic measures worthy of what we are, and are to be, by which we are about to demonstrate to the world that this nation still lives—aye, sir, more, that this nation not only lives, but is to become, if it is not already, on sea and land, the greatest military power of the earth.

“ ‘Other measures, unsuited to times of peace, of great importance, have been enacted. We have been called upon, in this time of civil war, to authorize the president to issue letters of marque and reprisal; and to declare by the almost unanimous voice of both houses of congress that any further efforts by France or England, or any other foreign power, to intervene or attempt to mediate in our affairs with a view to recognize the independent and separate existence of the southern rebellious confederacy, based as it is upon slavery as its chief corner stone, will be regarded as an unfriendly act toward this gov-

ernment, and at war with the fundamental principles of Christian civilization throughout the world. Should the European nations disregard our declaration thus solemnly made, God only knows what consequences may follow. We know we are right, and upon them will rest all the consequences.

“ ‘Besides these measures, one half of which I have not mentioned, so great and important, see what is going on here at home. While this war is raging; while the leaders of this unholy rebellion against every law, human and divine, are endeavoring to sever the cotton states from this Union, we have just passed through this body,—this last night of the session,—bills to admit two new states into this glorious sisterhood of states; two new states, soon to equal California in their mineral wealth and resources; two great states—golden states—on the great highway from the Atlantic to the Pacific,—on the line of the railroad (another great measure of the present congress), states which, as they become developed, are to bind in eternal embrace the East and the West, and make the union between our Atlantic and Pacific empire perpetual.

“ ‘Sir, I would not detain the senate, but I cannot forbear to allude to one or two topics more before I close. Look for a moment at the glorious free states of this Union. What a spectacle do they present to the civilized world! At this very hour, when we are in the midst of a gigantic war, our ships, laden with the voluntary contributions of the American people, are crossing the ocean three thousand miles to feed the starving children of the old world; speaking to them as we can, as no other nation on the earth can speak: ‘We have bread enough and to spare; land enough and to spare; come and enjoy them almost without money and without price. If too poor to come, we will send the bread to feed you.’

“ ‘In spite of rebellion at home; in spite of threatened intervention from abroad; we will be true to ourselves, true to humanity, true to the great principle which is the foundation stone of our Republic—Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. How should the people of the free states bless God, the Almighty, that in his mercy thus far, in the midst of this gigantic war, not one foot of their soil has been reddened with the blood of

this conflict. It has been confined to the insurrectionary districts; and the man or the men in those free states who sympathize with this rebellion, and who would transfer its bloody and devastating work to their hitherto peaceful and prosperous fields and cities and towns, should meet the indignant frowns of every man, woman and child. Ay, sir, justice should lash him with a whip of scorpions naked from the face of civilized man. But, sir, these sympathizers are already alarmed. They begin to go back to their hiding places. The day of judgment and of final retribution for them is at hand. They will call on the rocks and the mountains to cover them. We are to crush and put down this rebellion and all its aiders, abettors and sympathizers. This nation is to stand before the world, greater, more powerful, and more glorious than it has ever yet been, or than has ever entered into the imagination of man to conceive.

“ ‘Mr. President, it is in the utterance of sentiments like these that I would have this congress expire. I would have the last work spoken here, in the American senate, declare the unalterable purpose of the American people to be, to crush out this wicked rebellion. So far from giving over this controversy, in which we are now engaged, let that last word say to the world; —to traitors at home, and to those who would intervene from abroad: ‘We have just begun to fight; we are just bending ourselves to give our whole energies to the contest; we will fight it through; we will never surrender our sovereignty to our territories on the Gulf.’

“ ‘We bought Florida on purpose to get rid of a foreign power holding jurisdiction on the north side of the gulf; we bought Louisiana to hold the mouth of the Mississippi, upon grounds of the highest political necessity; and, in the name of the great North-West, I say, that they will hold the mouth of the Mississippi river, though they reduce Louisiana to what it was when we took it, a territory of swamps and crocodiles. They will never surrender it to any foreign power. Let us say to England and France, and to the whole civilized world, that to talk to us about our admitting the independence of another power holding the mouth of the Mississippi and our coast upon the Gulf of Mexico, is to talk of war with the United States.

Sir, it is necessary to our national life; every day and every hour but strengthen the conviction that we must hold it, though it shall involve foreign war; though it should bring the upheaving of the world. We shall never surrender our power there. We shall never give over the controversy. If this generation fail, our children after us will continue the struggle.

“‘I hope the senate will pardon me for giving utterance to such strong language. My feelings would not allow me to say less. Sir, I admit that sometimes the clouds hang over us with thick darkness; sometimes the light is almost obscured; yet, I have been blessed with that abiding faith, which, in the darkest hour, feels no doubt of our ultimate success. Our cause is the cause of humanity, the cause of constitutional liberty, for ourselves and for all mankind. There have been times, it is true, when the public mind has been oppressed with gloom; sometimes with apprehension; but beyond these clouds and through that gloom, I believe we can see the dawning light of the coming day. Sir, it is a part of my religious conviction, and I do not hesitate to declare even here, that this Republic, the United States of America, is that political power upon earth which the prophets have foretold, for which the good men of all ages have longed and prayed; and for whose success and duration, Heaven, with all its omnipotence, stands pledged. Sir, I believe that truth and justice, that liberty and law will triumph, and that the day of that triumph is drawing near.’

“In just four months after the delivery of the foregoing speech, came the great victory of Gettysburg, and the surrender of Vicksburg—the beginning of the end of the Rebellion.

“In another most trying emergency, the same abiding and unwavering faith in God showed itself. In 1864, when many leading Republicans were using all their power and influence to get Lincoln to withdraw in favor of some other candidate, Mr. Doolittle gave utterance to these words at a memorable speech at Springfield: ‘Fellow Citizens:—I believe in God, the Almighty; under Him, I believe in Abraham Lincoln.’

“This speech of thirteen words was received with such cheers and demonstrations by nearly 20,000 men that for a long time,

for the space of nearly half an hour, it was not possible for him to speak another word."

This speech of Senator Doolittle at the hour of closing of the thirty-seventh congress had a wonderful effect in the North. It inspired hope among the loyal citizens of the country. It gave renewed vigor to the dormant activities of many of the slumbering soldiers at the front. It aided President Lincoln in the prosecution of the work of the war. Judge Doolittle at once took a prominent place in the confidential councils of the nation. His absolute sincerity and honesty of purpose, shown by this short speech, was the talk of the country. The Honorable Thomas Ewing, his intimate friend and trusted advisor, assured him "that this was a very noble speech," certainly an opinion he need not be ashamed of. The speech was, indeed, most opportune.

It was not possible for Judge Doolittle to take neutral ground upon any important public question, or with relation to any prominent public man. So it was quite natural for him to declare for Abraham Lincoln for re-election for president. He could not do otherwise. He believed in him and believed that he was the man for the existing conditions in the country. He was prompt in so announcing his convictions. He was, indeed, a truly great public man, although often maligned and misrepresented. His fame, however, is safe.



JOHN ADAMS ON JOHN HANCOCK

[*From a Letter of John Adams to William Tudor, dated Quincy, Mass., June 1, 1817.*]

YOU “never profoundly admired Mr. Hancock. He had vanity and caprice.” I can say, with truth, that I profoundly admired him, and more profoundly loved him. If he had vanity and caprice, so had I. And if his vanity and caprice made me some times sputter, as you know they often did, mine, I well know, had often a similar effect upon him. But these little flickerings of little passions determine nothing concerning essential characters. I knew Mr. Hancock from his cradle to his grave. He was radically generous and benevolent. He was born in this town, half way between this house and our congregational temple, son of a clergyman of this parish, and grandson of a clergyman of Lexington, both of excellent characters. We were at the same school together, as soon as we were out of petticoats. His father died when he was very young. His uncle, the most opulent merchant in Boston, who had no children, adopted him, placed him in Mr. Lovell’s school, educated him at Harvard college, and then took him into his store.

And what a school was this! Four large ships constantly plying between Boston and London, and other business in proportion. This was in 1755. He became an example to all the young men of the town. Wholly devoted to business, he was as regular and punctual at his store as the sun in his course. His uncle sent him to London, from whence, after a residence of about a year, he returned to his store, with the same habits of business, unaltered in manners or deportment, and pursued his employments with the same punctuality and assiduity, till the death of his uncle, who left him his business, his credit, and his fortune; who did more—he left him the protector of his widow. This lady, though her husband left her a handsome in-

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